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CHASSIDISM

A Resumé of Modern Hebrew Mysticism

By

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With an Introduction by Professor C. H. Herford, M.A., Litt.D., of the University of Manchester.

Read before the Annual Conference in London of the International Society of Philology, Science and Fine Arts, June 2nd, 1916.

BLACKBURN:
GEO TOULMIN & SONS, LTD., "TIMES" OFFICE.

Everyone acknowledges, though few acknowledge quite willingly, the services rendered to European culture, in modern times, by the Jewish race.

Dispersed through many countries, and subject in some of them to grave disabilities, the Modern Jew, using English, French, German, Russian, or the universal language of music or of marble, has impressed himself upon western civilisation with an energy and success almost directly in proportion to the rigour of the legal and social obstacles placed in his path. To a vast number of Englishmen and Frenchmen to-day, Heine stands for German poetry. If any injustice be done to the immense and varied contributions of the Jewish intellect to our science, our literature, our erudition, or our art, it is not that they are overlooked, but rather that they are insisted on with an excessive and malicious emphasis.

There is one aspect of modern Jewish activity, however, which has so completely escaped this general recognition that for the mass of educated Europeans it hardly exists at all. The singular aptitude with which the Jew masters the usages as well as the languages of the Gentiles, and the sordid and unlovely qualities—one must add—which he often develops in the process, easily blinds us to the richness and beauty of the traditions which he inherits as a member of the Jewish community itself. Heine's *Prinzessin Sabbath* and the Mordicai scenes in *Daniel Deronda* cast a gracious and tender revealing light upon the Jewish home. But no George Eliot has given the Gentile world at large any adequate impression of the extent and significance of the literature written in modern times by Jews, in their own language, for one another. Hebrew—a language of ritual—is also, and has never ceased to be, a living speech, actively cultivated, in prose and verse, by distinguished scholars, journalists, novelists, and poets, especially in Germany and Russia. Very little of this literature is translated into any modern tongue, and even to the professed Hebraist—preoccupied as he commonly is with the literature of ancient Palestine—the Hebraic *belles letters* and poetry of modern

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Jewry appear to be almost wholly unknown. Mrs. Lucas's renderings of the lyrics of Jehuda ben Halevi and other Spanish singers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries gave some hint of the astonishing beauty inspired in these poets of the exile by the dream of their ruined but imperishable Jerusalem. But few suspect that singers of comparable power have rhymed in Hebrew in the century of Hugo and Shelley; or, again, that specifically Hebrew movements in philosophy and religion, rooted in the traditional ways of Jewish thought, but taking shape and colour from the ideals or the discoveries of modern speculation, ran their course and had their day in the age of Hume and Kant.

It is to one of these half-philosophic, half-religious movements that Mr. Wassilevsky has devoted the present erudite and illuminating study. The tenets and practice of the Chassidists show that this obscure body of believers carried out with rare logical consistency the root inspirations of mysticism, and this at a time in general strikingly aloof from the mystical temper. The mystical aspect of even the mightiest of Jewish or of seventeenth century thinkers, Spinoza, hardly attracted interest, save in Holland, until the young Goethe discovered him, a century after his death. And, speculative tenets apart, the Chassidist movement deserves a place in the social history of their age, perhaps even in the history of the quaint humours and pleasant eccentricities of the devout. Under all these aspects, in any case, it finds an admirable analyst and exponent in Mr. Wassilevsky; and the modernist, too, who may disdain the subject as barren antiquarianism, will find in his eloquent closing pages how nearly akin were the ideals which sustained this seemingly obsolete Jewish sect with the living hopes and aspirations of the Hebrew race, on which so bright a promise has dawned.

C. H. Herford.

CHASSIDISM.

INTRODUCTION.

One of the most remarkable events in the historical life of the Jews in exile was the rise amongst them, in the second half of the eighteenth century, of a new movement known as "Chassidism." This movement in its origin was profoundly national; and not, as many believe, merely the creation of a sect.

Dubnow, the famous modern Jewish historian, demonstrated from the geographical dispersion of the Chassidim, that their number amounts to five millions; and a movement that embraces almost one half of the Jewish nation cannot be regarded as other than national. Indeed, so joyously persuaded of the national character of their movement were its early adherents, that they did not hesitate to dub all who kept aloof, Mithnagdim (dissenters); and the serious student of the movement will not himself fail to discern in it the expression in a concrete form of the national will to live. For the will to live runs through the whole course of the history of the Hebrew Nation; its striving for existence is wonderful in its intensity, and the means by which it has withstood the forces tending to destroy it, form a phenomenon remarkable in the history of the world.

Almost two thousand years have elapsed since the Jewish Nation was deprived of its country and its political and national life. Jerusalem, the capital, was lost to the Jews; their true natural development was interrupted; scattered among all the nations, they degenerated and deteriorated in exile. During this time the Jew has belonged to the nations among whom he dwells; he has adopted their language, has observed their customs, has made their ideals his own, and has engaged in their battles, so that in the majority of cases there is mirrored in the Jew, not his Jewish self, but the distinctive characteristic of the nation among whom he dwells. Nevertheless, in his spiritual life, in his inner soul, he belongs to his people in its past and future, thanking God, the God of his forefathers, for his past and praying for the realisation

of the Jews as a nation in the future. He seeks while away from his country, a means of refuge for his ideals and aspirations, by absorbing in his spiritual Jerusalem, the systems and doctrine, which he finds in his environment. In fashioning his life thus, he hopes to be enabled to erect anew a territorial Jerusalem in his own land and to continue his interrupted development. Thus he has formulated the Talmudic Literature, the Hallachah, the Haggadah and the Midrash.

The Middle Ages were full of works, philosophic, theological, cabalistic and mystic, while the eighteenth century saw the rise of the Humanistic and Chassidic literatures. Each arose when the occasion demanded, and in each period is reflected on the one hand the priest and the scribe with a limited Judaism demanding the sacrifice of the Jew to the letter of the law, and on the other hand the prophet and the poet with an all-embracing Judaism exalting the Jew and adapting the law for him. In each of these epochs the Jewish soul is pregnant with an intense desire and supreme yearning for a part as a nation on the stage of life.

There is not in the literature of the Diaspora the same buoyancy of life as in the Bible. Life has lost much of its vigour, and literature much of its confidence. In vain we seek for the budding flower, the inspiring song of birds, the freedom of the open air, the gladness of health. Instead of an ordered development we find fluctuation, perplexity and discontent, reflecting rather a life of literature than a literature of life. The life of the Jew was concentrated on the Bible; each generation discovered in it what it set out to discover, and interpreted it according to the ideas of its time, taking as its principle, not the letter, but that which was believed to be its hidden meaning.

It is difficult for the wanderer to whom every road of natural development is artificially closed to hold an even balance between the will, the intellect and instinctive feeling. The will to live and to progress, the desire to survive in spite of all obstacles often subdues every other faculty, and becomes an obsession to the exclusion of every other thought and idea.

"As long as the Jew is in exile," says one of the exponents of Chassidism, "his power of expression is in exile too, and his speech will only be perfect when he is redeemed." The beauty of the heavens, the bright sun, the fresh air, and the green fields were no longer his and lost their interest. The style in which Chassidists expressed their idea was vague and imperfect, and the style which characterises the Cabalistic and the Chassidic literature is very strange. They personified God and attributed everything in the world to one of his parts. The fusion of God and man known as the "Higher Unity" has its reflection in their literature in the love of man for woman.

This idea of "erotic mysticism" finds a semblance in English literature in "The Song of Solomon" by Richard Crashaw (1613-1649). So coarse a materialisation of the idea was not foreseen by its originators, but it is easy to see that such a form is open to grave dangers. Whatever the outward form, however, the inner soul of this literature attains great heights and has its full share of glory and beauty, and the Spirit of God is already reflected therein.

The Chassidic mysticism, though based on many new principles, is a continuation of the Cabbala and is like all mystical movements, a temperament rather than a series of doctrines, an atmosphere rather than a philosophical system. There is more therein of the heart of the Jew and his emotions than of his intellect and his logic. "Mysticism," says Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (a town in Podolia, Russia), "begins where science and philosophy end. Faith commences where knowledge has ceased." Chassidic mysticism has its province outside the realm of the intellect, and therefore excels in beauty and insight and is superior to any philosophy of life. It has its origin in the heart and in the imagination, being a song of the soul, exalted in its scope, pure in its emotion, philosophic in its implications, and it is to the heart and the imagination that it returns. It is true that its ideas are imperfect and without system; and its constant repetitions are a source of boredom to the modern reader. Of the many volumes, only three or four are complete; the others seem to have neither a true beginning nor a logical end. Once, however, superfluities and excrescences

are overcome, we find passages revealing a flood of hidden light, visions unlimited and worlds beautiful in song and poesy.

II.—The Cause of Chassidism.

The word "Chassid" is derived from "Chessed," and means one who does a kind action though under no obligation to do it. It is often found in the Bible, and in the Talmud many virtues are described as Chassidic. According to the Talmud, Chassidim have a share in the next world, though they need not necessarily be Jews. Sects of Chassidim existed in ancient times. In the age of the Maccabeans one of their tenets was not to fight against the Greeks on the Sabbath. The Talmud records a sect of Chassidim who spent nine hours a day in prayer. Their common characteristics were cheerfulness and good nature. From the thirteenth century the word is more frequently used. Everyone who rigorously practised his religion and lived the life of an ascetic was called a Chassid. It has been suggested that "Chassid" can be compared with the word "pius" in Latin. Sects called "Chassidim" are found in the seventeenth century, but they have no connection with the latest Chassidic movement, though similar to it in many respects. Their influence was not great and not much notice was taken of them.

The Chassidic movement came in the middle of the 18th century, as did the Cabbala in the 13th century —when Judaism in many respects ceased to be a living organism in the social life of the Jews; and in the same way as the Cabbala, it had to combat the philosophy of rationalism which, in seeking to bring Judaism into line with the teaching of Aristotle and to impose its system as an immutable law, succeeded in extinguishing its real spark of life; just as the Cabbala entered upon a severe struggle with those who would reduce Judaism to the level of a spiritless lip-service, so the Chassidim had to combat both the dryness of Rabbinic literature and the Haskallah, which, though also opposed to the Rabbinic literature, sought its remedy in the fusion of Judaism with the new culture of contemporary Europe. The Humanists desired the Jews to

have their home in Europe and to be merged in the nations of different lands.

Hebrew Mysticism, even before this, had spread its influence among the Jews, but this mysticism which had at first been a protest against the automatic performance of the ceremonies of religion, preferring the kernel to the shell, itself became soulless and external. It found relief in seclusion from the world like the Stoics and Cynics of former days. Talmudic scholars took for their texts Cabalistic phrases without appreciating their meaning, and turned to a life of prayer, repentance and self-torture as a means of atonement for the sins of the nation and for its redemption. The Jews in Eastern Europe experienced a terrible void. External troubles were fearful; the situation in the first half of the eighteenth century became worse and worse as the years passed, both in Russia and Poland. Wherever they turned, they met with contempt and ill-treatment. Within the Ghetto a scholastic autocracy burdened them with customs and laws; their faith in the national mission of the Caballa became weaker, since it had given up this world, and the people could not attain to the higher world to which it pointed. The Humanist movement was intellectual and could not, owing to its metaphysical character, attract the Jews whose cultural standard had so deteriorated.

The Jew needed a new spiritual movement; a simple faith was necessary to which his soul could rise and in which he should find a refuge for his troubles, personal and national. The natural instinct of the Jewish nation impelling it to seek special paths of life, to distinguish it from other nations, created the spiritual movement known as the Chassidic movement which was to found for him a heaven on earth, and to teach him that man, like Jacob's ladder, may aspire to heavenly heights even while its feet are touching the ground, and that to do even the simplest acts is to serve God. This movement in its general compass is one of the most important and original, not only in Jewish history, but in the history of all religious development. While other religious movements arose for the reformation of *religion*, Chassidism attempted to reform the *believer himself*, and was

thus a greater and more important reform. There can therefore be seen in it the soul's yearning fo the source of the world and for the source of life.

III.—The Founder of the Chassidic Movement.

He in whom this new mystic movement found its origin was known as Rabbi Israel Ben Eliezer or as Baal Shem Tov, the latter meaning "The Man of Good Name." His early life is shrouded in darkness. Although it is only 200 years since he lived (according to Dr. Schechter, he was born in 1700), legend has crowned his life with a wealth of tradition which has enriched it with as many fables as surround the life of Elijah, Jesus, or Buddha. It is difficult accurately to judge where fable ends and history begins. Baal-Shem is reputed to have brought about the following miracles, among many others. He is said to have restored life to the dead, though he was afterwards punished for it; to have crossed a river on his belt through his overpowering faith; to have obtained water by striking the ground with his stick; to have appeared to his disciples after death; and to have committed many other wonderful deeds.

From the few historical facts intermingled with this mass of legend, we learn that he was the child of a poor family living in Ocup, a little town on the border of Poland and Wallachia. According to legend, his parents were bordering on a hundred years of age at his birth, and Elijah the prophet appeared to his father to tell him of the birth of a son who would be one of the shining lights of Israel, as a reward for having withstood the temptation sent him by a princess. His father died before he was a year old, and his mother a few days later. Left alone on the hands of the community, he was cared for by them, and a teacher was engaged for him. He did not, however, find the dismal walls of the schoolroom very congenial, so he used to leave the town and hide in the forest. When it was found impossible to do anything with him, he was left alone and became an assistant to a teacher of infants. His work did not consist in teaching, but in bringing the children to school and in taking them to the synagogue. At the age of thirteen he became assistant beadle.

At this time he studied secretly, and became acquainted with the son-in-law of a rich man who studied in the Beth-Hamidrash and whose servant he became. Both studied during the night some mystical manuscripts in the possession of this young man. Baal-Shem was not considered as one of the Talmudic scholars in the city, nor was he ever afterwards considered as such. He did not marry till he was seventeen, in those days an advanced age for a bachelor. When a few years later his wife died Baal-Shem left the town, married a woman once divorced of a Rabbinical family, and the couple settled down in a village. He spent seven years in the Carpathian mountains, only returning for the Sabbath. His wife, who was always a great support to him, used to come twice or three times a week with a waggon, in which he placed the lime he had dug, and which she was to sell. Legend has invested the Carpathian Mountains with many descriptions of Baal-Shem's actions. How amid the great heights and in the low valleys, in the thick of the forests, in the wild beauty of nature he entered the abysmal depths of thought. How this absorption in his thoughts lasted for three days and nights, and how finally the mountain peaks sank into the valleys and all around him became one vast plain in which he found God, the God of all creation in whom everything above and below find unity.

All the knowledge that he acquired during this time he kept to himself, and he was considered ignorant by all who came in contact with him. Only when he was thirty-six years of age did he settle with his family in a little town in Galicia, where he gradually revealed his powers and owing to his knowledge of charms and spells and the medicinal value of herbs, he became popular as a saint, able to cure the sick, and to discover sins by a mere glance at a man's forehead. He then removed to Miedziboz, where his position was improved, and his name became famous. Around him now were gathered many Chassidim and disciples, and many of his early opponents among whom were great Talmudic scholars who, though superior to him in knowledge, now became his disciples. From this point onwards the biographical parts of the legends cease almost entirely. The

remainder of Baal-Shem's life remains almost unknown. From such records as exist it is known that he mixed with the masses, participated in their controversies and was one of them. Of a very good and charitable nature, he never kept money overnight, but gave it away, and spoke well of his enemies. He looked after his pupils and supplied the poorer ones with all necessities. They loved him like a father and he treated them as if they were his sons, so that each was the spiritual portrait of the other.

The following legend is told to illustrate the spirituality of their friendship. Baal-Shem said " My soul was unwilling to enter this world because of the fiery serpents which exist in every generation, fearing lest it would be unable to withstand them and should be rendered worthless. I was therefore given sixty heroes with pious souls to guard it."

Baal-Shem died a natural death, though he is reputed to have been familiar with heaven and its denizens. Angels and Seraphim were said to tremble at his approach. The Angel of Death fled at his word, but, when he was given permission to take Baal-Shem's soul, " his shoulders broadened and Baal-Shem lost all his power over him and had to submit." He died and was gathered to his people at the age of sixty-three. His soul, according to one of his disciples, departed in a blue flame and the two clocks in the house stopped.

Baal-Shem left no books. The mystical manuscript which he studied with the young man mentioned above and through which he had attained to his power, was hidden by him in a rock in a mountain. Thanks to his heroic pupils, among whom were Rabbi Dove Ber and Jacob Joseph Hacohen, his doctrines were collected and inscribed in their books. They have not a common method, and their interpretation differs, for one bases Chassidism on the ideal or on union with God, while another on precept, action, or morality. All are pervaded by one spirit, and through them and their disciples, Chassidism has made wonderful progress, and enveloped in its fold the world of Jewry.

The ten thousand whom Baal-Shem left have increased in great numbers despite the opposition of the Wilna Gaon and his disciples. The Chassidic movement introduced a new stream of life into the Jewish nation. Its founder did

not claim to be a Messiah, and the movement did not bring material prosperity, but by its spiritual influence it diminished for its followers the bitterness of exile. It caused the troubles of this world to seem illusory while it made real the joys of a fairy land where the Jew could find a world of joy instead of grief, where he could experience the enthusiasm of hope instead of the oppression of despair. Some indeed made the movement an excuse for their debauchery and depravity, for their haughtiness and arrogant self-righteousness, but it may well be questioned whether any movement, a religious one in particular, has been free from such traits. Many crimes are now being committed before our eyes in the name of religion and other lofty ideals. It would, however, be unjust to judge any movement from the crimes committed in its name.

It is right to state that many people among their former adherents who had seceded from the movement saw in Chassidism only the ignorance and madness which appear on the surface. Many of the Rabbis and Humanists looked upon it as a morbid disease which had unfortunately attached itself to the Jewish nation. They condemned it because, viewing the movement from the outside, and cognisant only of its not always pleasing external aspects, they were unable to appreciate it as a whole. The doctor may dissect the body, but he can find no traces of the soul. Chassidism is not free from fault or folly. Its outbursts of emotion enslave the intellect. These were the results of psychological, social and political causes, but the essence of Chassidic mysticism is full of life and the defective personalities are holy and pure within. It has its period of hysteria, but that is only the inevitable concomitant of birth and growth. This period was in general one of feverish unrest. The atmosphere of the Ghetto was asphyxiating. The Jew was burdened by the yoke of bondage within and without, and a yearning for a revival and for fresh life awakened the desire for something occult and invisible. Among those of the Jews who shared in European culture the Humanist movement spread, while among the others there arose the religious and mystical movement of Chassidism.

IV.—Absolute Unity.

The fundamental feature of Chassidism is its faith in an absolute One. Although unity is the central idea of every mystic movement, yet this idea is always more apparent than real. For, the further light travels from its source, the more it becomes dim and faint until it disappears altogether. Unity tends to break up into duality. Similarly in the Cabbala also the idea of unity is only superficial, and particularly superficial is the idea of unity in the mysticism of Luria, who introduced into his system the conception of Divine self-limitation. "When God desired to create the worlds," he says, "there was no space wherein he could place them, so He shrank within Himself in order to leave room for these words."

This is not quite the idea of Chassidism. The Chassidic movement, like the Cabbala, it is true, sees duality in everything, good and evil, truth and falsehood, holiness and unholiness, but for it this *duality* is only apparent, while for the Cabbala it is the *unity* which is superficial. Absolute unity between all existence and God is the first principle of its system.

"The Chassidic movement," as Hillel rightly observes, "was compelled to accept the idea of duality since it could not wholly ignore doctrines of the mystic systems which had gone before it." According to Chassidism, God permeates all existence. Divinity pervades all life, material, plant and animal, including all creation, good or evil. It appears in the veriest depths of life, even in evil. "Even in idolatry there is a Divinity which gives the idols life." "Infinity is absolute oneness." It has divisions only in its means of expression, but this is for the sake of mankind who could not otherwise comprehend God. "No place can be void of God though He, knowing mankind to be unable to receive the full intensity of His light, has limited and dulled it, but He has not entirely disappeared, so that God is in everything. "When a parent explains something to his child, he must limit his intellect to a child's understanding. The intellect is the same, but it has descended some degrees lower than its usual state."

When man commits a sin, there are still evidences of Divinity, since without it he would have been unable to commit a crime or even to exist. It is the Divinity which gives him the power of life. "God is everywhere, even in the place of sin, and the pleasure of the sinner is derived from a higher pleasure." "In every word the Lord centres His Divinity, because all the world is the Holy One, blessed be He, and from everywhere and from all things He calls and cries and beckons to man to approach Him." Since then God is omnipotent, it behoves man to seek the inner light in everything. "When we see a beautiful woman we must ask ourselves whence she derives her beauty for if she were dead the beauty of her countenance would be lost. The freshness of her beauty then is derived from Divinity. A beautiful vessel may be made of clay; the beauty of its form is derived from God. The disunion which is seen in nature is but apparent."

Works may be many and diverse, but the spirit of the creator is one and indivisible. "The apparent disunion is for the benefit of man, and to the non-comprehension of this fact is due its seeming defect." If the Divinity had not dulled itself by assuming these forms, it would have been impossible for man to appreciate its light. "God has limited His light, and appears to everyone in such a form as to be recognisable."

According to Zohar, God's proper attribute is infinity or "Ain" (naught), and this negative "naught" becomes the positive reality of life, but this entity and existence are abstract and spiritual. This negative naught is incomprehensible except by the inner soul. For instance, there is a moment in the development of an egg into a chicken when it could not positively be stated whether it was an egg or a chicken. This is the moment of nullity, and this moment is true reality, while that known to us as reality is indeed naught. "What appears positive in human life," said Baal-Shem, "is merely deception."

V.—Deception.

All existence, according to Chassidism, is false, deceptive and illusory. All that appears outside us and apart from

us is in itself nothing, and depends on the word of God. He and it are one. "As far as man can comprehend the nullity of existence, he can see that all is deceptive and can penetrate through this illusion," said Baal-Shem, and gave the following parable :—

"There was once a king who, by his magic power, surrounded his palace with many rooms and gates. He commanded that all his treasure should be scattered in these rooms, threw them open to the public, and hid himself in the last room. All who entered, dazzled by the treasure, took what they desired, but none attempted to penetrate further into the place. At length his only son tried to approach him. Then the son saw that in reality nothing lay between him and his father, but that all was illusion. Such is the form of the world. All that shuts the Lord from our gaze is merely illusory, since everything is but a part of him. He has hidden Himself in the open, and revealed Himself in what is hidden. The Lord detached worlds from Himself and created something from nothing, so that the saint (Zaddik) shall make nothing from something. In every material joy or sadness there is a spark of the Holy One, Blessed be He, but it is hidden under many coverings, and so there is Divinity in Good and Evil."

VI.—Good and Evil.

Since God is in all existence there can therefore be no evil in the world, for then there would be two contraries in unity. All things come from God; it is the mind of the receiver which causes the difference, in proportion to the degree of his intelligence. The same thing may be good to one and bad to another. "The sun shines to all the world alike; some things are melted by its heat, others are hardened, some things whitened, others darkened. The sun does not change, it is the things which receive the light which change." "God embodies all good, it is mankind which interprets it evilly."

Good and Evil are indeed not two separate things, but one entity. "Evil is but a lower degree of Good." "All things in the world are like letters, in themselves good. It is man's combination of them which makes them evil, and in reality there is no difference between letters of idolatry and of sanc-

tity. The combination of the letters of unholy things is the defect, and this defect man must mend." All the evil in the world is but a lower degree of goodness, and a spiritual interpretation converts all things bad to good. For there is a spirit of good in things evil, and if man could attain to absolute goodness he would cease to exist, since he would have attained divinity. "God made the world as it is with all its shadows, which appear evil and corrupt the soul." "Man must not turn away from evil but must raise it and purify it in the fire of God."

VII.—Man.

Man, according to the Chassidim, is next to divinity, and has in him the component parts of all creation. When he is exalted and is faithful to God, all creation is exalted; when he falls, all creation falls. If his thoughts are holy and spiritual, all about him is holy and spiritual; if his thoughts are evil, all is evil. In him, as in God, are ten spheres. "As a shadow is to man, so may God be said to be to man, and all in heaven is the embodiment of his mind." Whatever man is about to do is told him by the Divinity that pervades him. "The pure-hearted man, when following the direction of his heart, is following God's command, the principle of divinity lies in the heart." Chassidism appreciates the difference in the emotions and the characters of man, and realises that the more man endeavours to conquer passion and sin, the stronger they become. "Man is a ladder, even though he be the lowest rung touching earth. Some ascend through holy thoughts and some descend through evil thoughts, but the Lord God hovers over the ladder, and envelops both the good and the bad." "If man commits a crime, it must be remembered that he still has God within him, and there is nothing void of God."

"Man has body and soul which, according to Chassidism, are antagonistic. The body follows its own desires, which are material, while the soul yearns after the spiritual. Man's aim in life should be to submerge the body in the soul, and to convert the spirit of evil into a spirit of holiness, till both having attained goodness should together support man so that there should

be oneness and unity instead of divergence and duality. This idea may not be as great as Blake's when he said "Man has no Body distinct from the Soul, for that called Body is a portion of the Soul discerned by the five senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age," but it has more truth and is more practical. Man having attained purification himself is to purify others. The saint must not be anchorite, but must live with the mass, and his holiness must serve to bring them up to a higher level. The soul is not superior to the body, nor the body to the soul, since each is necessary to the other. "The learned and the wise must not say that there is no need of the mass, which may be compared to the body, nor must the mass say that there is no need of the wise man who are as the soul."

VIII.—The Soul and the Body.

"The soul makes the body," says Emerson, the Chassid in English literature, and Edmund Spenser has it:—

"For of the soul the body form doth take,
For soul is form and doth the body make."

"In proportion to the purity of the soul," says Chassidism, "is the purity of the body, for if the soul is perverted, so is the body and physical beauty depends on spiritual beauty. The cultivation of the soul is the most important factor in life in Chassidism as in the Cabbala. "Even as the light of a candle struggling upwards as if desiring to part from its wick, so the soul of man attempts to escape from the body and unite with its origin God, Who is the essence of life. Though it feels that if this is attained it will become as nothing and lose all traces of individuality, still it is in the nature of the soul to part from the body." "In the actions of man his soul is recognisable, for the power of action is derived from the soul." "The actions of the saints cause delight and joy to the beholders, since their power of action is derived from God above, Who is absolute Goodness. The mere imitation of the action of others is ineffective, since man's soul is not therein." "Every soul has a special melody tuned according to its nature." Though the principle thing in life is the soul, still Chassidism appreciates the importance of the body. In this it differs from the Cabbala of Luria.

The material world was, in the eyes of the old Hebrew Mystics, changed to a world of mystery and of soul. For the improvement of the soul they could find no better way than the mortification of the body, the submerging of the instinct of life and fasting. Their followers ate bread dipped in ashes, worked little for the necessities of life till the world became a world of sadness and melancholy. The Chassidic movement opposed this and defended the rights of the body, pleading against its mortification. "Thou shalt not hide thyself from thy flesh" is one of the principles of Chassidism, "for from the weakness thereof comes the weakness of the soul." "Some worship God by prayer and fasting, others by the ordinary daily actions, and the latter are the more acceptable to God." "If a man desires to eat something it is because the holy spark necessary for the remedy of his soul is embodied in this thing." For this reason Chassidism prefers Joy to Grief in all actions. Their joy is not coarse, but may be an inner grief and a yearning of the soul.

IX.—Joy and Grief.

"Fight against these little souls among you, who are always lamenting," says one of the Jewish saints, "fight and do not keep silent." "Joy is the principal thing in the worship of God. "Joy comes from the world of pleasure and is an incomprehensible spirit, having a higher stage known as holiness." "To weep is bad, for man must worship with joy. To shed tears of joy is good." "Tears may open the gate but joy breaks down the wall." "Man must always endeavour to live cheerfully whether he be winning or losing. If he has committed a sin he must not grieve too much. When he has repented he can return cheerfully to the Lord." Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, a grandson of Baal-Shem, and melancholy by nature, told his disciples, "Though I look sad you must not imitate me. Joy shews the great love of man for any object and is higher than weeping and lamentation, because the principle of the worship of God among the Chassidim is not so much fear as love."

X.—The Love and Fear of God.

Love and fear of God, according to Chassidism, are identical: they constitute one complete conception, namely,

"thinking of God," which comes at first from the fear of an ever-punishing God, changes from that to an awe of an incomprehensible infinity and ends in divine love. "Where there is fear of punishment, there cannot be love which has its origin in loving kindness," said Rabbi Jacob Joseph Hacohen, one of the most important of Baal-Shem's disciples, and continues: "This is not so with inner fear and inner love which are from their very sublimity one."

To Rabbi Ber, Baal-Shem's successor, and to the Rabbi from Lody, his disciple, fear is not fear of punishment, but fear of the greatness of the Lord, which is reverence. They were influenced by Rabbinical ideas, which placed the end of prayer in fear, and which taught that if a man did a thing from enthusiasm he would leave out some details while if he did it from fear he would carry it out exactly. Most of the leaders of Chassidism put fear below love, which according to them comes neither through the understanding nor through knowledge, but from a higher origin which is divinity itself. Nor is there a greater bond of union in the world than the bond of love. The word for Love, *Ahabah,* in Hebrew, was made by a mystical combination of letters which numerically equal thirteen, as does *Echod,* which means "one." *Love* then is *unity.* By the same process *Jehovah* comes to the same number as *Haavoh* doubled. "Since *Jehovah,* Who is God, is one, so love is one." "Faith is love, and is the root of all things." "By doing something which arises from faith and love man gains a share of the next world.' Since Chassidism sees everything in love it is opposed to the dry and formal prayer of the Rabbonim and prefers the prayer of the heart and devotion to God.

XI.—Prayer.

Chassidic prayer is an ecstatic poem of each loving and tremulous heart in communion with God. It expresses the sole relationship between man, the worshipper and inquirer, and the divinity that is worshipped and sought. "Only when man is in the lowest stages of life should he pray from the prayer-book; when his spiritual vision broadens, it is better for him to close his eyes, so that the formality of prayer

should not come in between him and the higher divinity. The principle in prayer is not a formal set of prayers, but a loving and feeling heart." Prayer must come from the innermost depths, and must be caused by the yearning of the soul. Prayer is the child of the soul, "and it is very good to pray to God in the green grass or among the tall trees in field and in forest, since every blade of grass sings unto the Lord, without any ulterior motive." Then, says Rabbi Nachman, "the prayer of man intermingles with the song of nature." "When man has sufficiently abstracted himself from all earthly things, all the angels break into a chant, and all creation joins in for all are expressed through him." When a Jew prays in the forest or in a village even without a Minian—ten men requisite for prayer unto the Lord, especially insisted on by the Rabbonim—God unites to his prayer heaven, forest and field, for God loves the prayer of the villager or of the man in the forest. "He who prays must not pray for anything material, but for the redemption of his soul, for in the former there is division—the intrusion of the material into the spiritual." Man must not be selfish in his prayer, but must pray for the whole community, and as he prays for himself, he must pray even for his enemies." Prayer alone does not suffice. "'A man may be honest and saintly though he is not learned, but he cannot attain to true prayer without the study of the Torah."

XII.—Torah.

Although the Chassidic movement is based on prayer, still the Torah is everything, and everything is the Torah, but Torah with a soul and understanding. To the Chassidim Torah was not only given from Heaven, but is Heaven itself, and therefore the Torah must not be petrified. "The Oral Law is an example that all the Torah ought to be studied on every occasion by means of the intellect and the understanding. Every Saint has a part in the Torah." The letters of the Torah are only symbols; it is its interpretation by the spiritual leaders of the generation which counts. "To the Saint the Torah only consists of floating letters, and it is open to every saint to interpret it according to his own ideas." "The Torah is only receptive. It is we who in-

fluence it as it does our life." A man must not, however, devote the whole of his time to study, but must "mix with people to be able to understand the character of everyone, so as to appreciate that God is in the lowest grades of life," Torah itself is not enough and man must sanctify himself with all virtues.

"Everything which happens to man shall be alike to him whether he be praised or despised." The tongue is the pen of the heart. "Words are temples in which God is enshrined, and so they must not be used irreverently." "Man must not abuse his fellow man even though he be wicked." "When a man is chastised for doing evil, he must be chastised from love." "Charity should be given before the poor stretch out their hands." A good deed must not be done because of the reward which is to follow it, so that it will be seen more easily whether it ought to be done or not. "A man's ideas are his virtues, and all his thoughts are concentrated on his particular virtue." "All man does must be done with all his might with the intensity of love and enthusiasm."

XIII.—Hithlahabuth and Hithdabkuth.

Enthusiasm, Union with God, and Holiness, are the three cardinal virtues of a Chassid. Through Enthusiasm or Hithlahabuth, man attains to that degree of perfection in which he finds Union with God, since through it "all the lower worlds combine in the Lord and everything becomes one." By this union there is removed the veil which divides this world from the world above. Then man arrives at that union with God, which causes oblivion of everything and the abolition of matter, so that body and soul become separate and the soul assumes the form of man's thoughts. Man becomes one with divinity, everything becomes holy.

All that is unholy in man becomes purified into a holy substance. "We can attain this stage," said Baal-Shem, when there is rooted in our hearts the idea that there is no existence besides that of God and whatever appears to us as separate from the Lord is perfect Divinity." "For God is present and absent, visible and invisible at the same time." Man must not only worship with holy thoughts, but must do every-

day matters in the same spirit. Swedenborg says "Men live a moral life either for the sake of the Divine Being, or for the sake of men in the world; but only the moral life which is lived for the sake of the Divine Being is spiritual life. Both appear alike in their outward form, but in their inward form they are altogether different. The one saves man, the other does not save him." "Israel is a holy people," says Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, who had not even heard of Swedenborg, "for even all mundane matters are done by it by the command of the Holy One, Blessed be He. Israel's mission is to abstract from exile the Divine and the Holy, known in Hebrew as the Shechinah, which laments and mourns like a bereaved woman over her children of Israel, who are scattered all over the world."

XIV.—Woman.

The attitude of Chassidim to woman is the same as that of Hebrew literature in general, and the Cabbala. There are two kinds of women according to Chassidim, as there are two kinds of men. Woman has the elements of good and evil combined. That which divides woman the angelical, and woman the diabolical, is more subtle than that which divides Heaven from Hell. Sometimes Chassidism sees in woman that beauty of the body which causes the evil-doing of man, who is her soul and whose origin is "Superior Wisdom." Matter and body are called woman. Idea and Soul are man. Sometimes woman is so exalted that she and divinity are one. All that is beautiful and tender, beloved and sweet, pleasing, amusing, is attributed to woman. She is love, mercy, comfort, saviour and redeemer combined.

According to Chassidism, therefore, celibacy is very dangerous because the celibate cannot thoroughly understand life. "Who has not loved a woman is like unto an ass, and is even worse, for Divine worship can only be appreciated from emotion and impression. Love exalts and strengthens man and gives him a healthy outlook. When Jacob kissed Rachel, he immediately was able to remove the rock which covered the well." This love of which Chassidism speaks is not the coarse terrestrial love which finds consummation in sensuality, but

rather spiritual love, like that of Mellisande and Pelleas; hidden longing, inner affinity of two souls, the love of children for each other or of man for nature. In this it agrees with Plato and Francis Thompson. "The beauty of woman is but an avenue to a higher beauty." "When Jacob saw Rachel he fell in love with an ideal Rachel for the beauty of Rachel was but a mould of the ideal which is divinity." For the sake of woman there is divinity in the home, and she is thus a source of blessing to man. "If God wants man to have a home, and be fortunate, He has in store for him a clever woman. For by the wisdom of woman is a home erected."

True beauty and true love of woman can only be seen by a man with pure eyes who can see in her the ideal beauty. The Pandemic lover who is captured by physical beauty, will never appreciate true womanhood. In this Chassidism is superior to the modern view of love, which has passion as its principle. Chassidism understood the danger which besets such a view. There is passion in Chassidic love, but a passion which yields to spiritual love. Sensual passion is not an end, but a means to an end. True marriage is the ideal marriage. "The union of two things," according to Chassidism, "comes through music: the music of two souls desiring to unite," and this is the symbol attached to wedding music.

XV.—Song and Music.

All creation resolves itself into song and music, and the Chassidic ear can discover in everything its melodies. Heaven and earth are full of song. There are temples which may not be opened except with the accompaniment of music and song. Every attempt of man to uplift himself can only be made effective by music. Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, the nightingale in the Chassidic movement, finds in music the foundation of all acts and thoughts. He thought of everything in terms of music. "From all the trees and herbs," he says, "and from everything in the world, messages are issued to the Saint who is willing to accept them, and to purify them." There is one eternal universal melody of a very high and holy order. "In the soul of every Jew there is a minute part of

that melody, and the Zaddik (the Saint) gathers all the scattered parts and he plays all the melody and awakens all the parts, causes all the hearts to sing as he purifies and beautifies them." "The soul that hears that part of the melody that appertains to it is awakened and purified, and rises to a new life."

Not only is Israel's world a melody, but all the world is but a song and a dance before the Lord. "The Torah is such a song, as are the folk-melodies of all nations." Everything sings, everything plays. Every letter of the Torah is a musical note, and every soul is a melody. "Each science has its own peculiar melody. The more noble the science, the nobler its melody." "As religion has its melody, so has heresy." "The Saint attains the noblest melody." "Every shepherd has a peculiar melody according to the grass and the nature of his pasture." From the song of the grasses emanates the melody of the shepherd. "For every blade of grass has a different song, and as there are various grades of music, so are there different instruments in which to express the melody and every note harmonizes with a special instrument and goes out as the soul from the body." Man only sings one bar of the melody. From the secrets of the universe and the exclamation of voices which Chassidism has collected, it has made a special music which expresses the language of the Chassid in a wonderful manner, and so, Chassidic dances express the agitation of fiery souls.

XVI.—Music and Dance.

The Chassidic movement has also produced a special music, not opera or oratorio, but melody without words. All its melodies express a longing and yearning for life, for the world, for humanity. As all these have been taken away from the Jew, and as Chassidism sees the coarseness of the forms in which they are expressed and is unable to rectify it, it abandons them. It takes to flight with its music as with its literature, and finds refuge in the abstract worlds which cannot be profaned by unholy souls, and in which all is perfection. The sorrow of the Jew and of humanity are in its music. It complains, laments, yearns and hopes at the same time. It is questioning and answering, though answers

oft fail it, and it has to end with faith, totally ignoring reality. It ignores this world and this life, and transfers itself to worlds where judgment and calculation, thoughts and even emotions are non-existent, but all are nothing. It is wild and unpolished, with little technique, but always has a holy and pure soul-like expression.

It is regrettable that there has not yet arisen a musical genius who shall properly express its soul and enrich the world with a new creation. Jews of musical genius have had very little connection with Jewish nationality. They will imitate and borrow from others, and will rather pervert their originality than show the world their Judaism. A few men of musical genius, Jews and Christian, especially Russian, as Anton Rubinstein, Rimski Korsakow, Glimki and others, did utilise this music, but they converted it and universalised it, crushing out its inner soul in such a way that it portrayed many aspects of the Jew, but not the Jew himself. Chassidic music still awaits a musical genius who will give it a technical form without injuring its inner soul. This music has created dances, not external ceremonies like those of the savages, but holy and mystic. Sometimes these dances cease to be merely a dance of feet and body, but there is seen in it a soul ecstasy expressed in physical movement.

It often occurs that a party of Chassidim are seated round a table on the Sabbath or on the occasion of some festival. Their faces are glum and long, their cheeks sunken, and their eyes are full of sadness. Their lips are slightly twitching, their backs are bent and their legs seem barely strong enough to support them. Each is overshadowed by his anxieties, personal and national, and these seem to pervade the atmosphere. Then, as if from nowhere, in the midst of a conversation on everyday matters, a slight humming may be heard. Soon the melody which arises seems to permeate everybody. There is indeed the echo of a sob in it at first, but this is soon transformed to a hopeful chant; lamentation is turned to joy, despair to hope, which becomes faith then trust and then enthusiasm. Feet are raised, normal attitudes assumed, bodies grow erect, hands are joined and a dance begun. The women who are watching

are happy and excited, and each follows the movements of her husband. The children at their side open-eyed and amazed feel their hearts beating with a holy spirit. They are very far from the worries of the outside world. The pace of the dance grows faster and faster, coat-tails fly in the air, and feet seem never to touch the earth. Their hearts seem to bask in a sun of love, everything is holy, good and beautiful and they seem to be new men in body and soul. Without premeditation, hands are relaxed and each dances in the circle which is formed. For them there is no longer any hate or jealousy. All physical movement vanishes and what movement there is, is of super-souls.

XVII.—Israel and His Country.

The literature of Chassidism, like all Hebrew literatures before it, and the Hebrew religion itself, is both national and universal, in spite of the exaggerated nationalism and snail-like confinement within itself which was the result of external oppression and the product of bitter exile. As one literature created the faith in a Messianic national state, another, faith in a future world, for the individual's reward, another, faith in an exile which atones for sin, and a martyrdom which purifies, so the Chassidic movement created the faith in a spiritual Jerusalem to be attained by men in exile on this earth. To redeem Israel from exile, or to redress his sufferings there, was impossible for it. It could not console the Jews with a belief in a miraculous redemption. It could therefore only bring comfort by erecting spiritual worlds on this earth.

This compromise with exile, however, was but apparent. Israel and his land is the principle in the creation Beer of Mizritz, "is the principal place in the world and in life. It therefore contains parts of all countries and each country receives its life, and has its essence in that part which comes from Zion." "Every Jew must not only travel to Palestine," said Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, "but must also be willing to make the journey on foot." Living in Palestine was one of the great principles of Baal-Shem and his disciples. Even Baal-Shem set out for Palestine, but he was told, according to legend, by the Divinity not to anticipate

the Messiah. The ship on leaving Stamboul was wrecked, and at the repeated importunities of his family he returned. Many of his pupils, however, settled there. Rabbi Shnaier Zalmon, who attempted to give to the Chassidic movement a philosophic form, though unsuccessful in his attempt to go to the holy land, was entirely devoted to the ideal of colonising it in accordance with his religious views.

"Everywhere," Chassidism tells us, "Israel and God are one, and each is incomplete without the other. Israel and God are like father and son; the portrait of the son is engraved on the mind of the father. All who afflict Israel, afflict the Lord, Blessed be He, and so one who harms his country endangers his soul. The spies of the wilderness who were Saints, and therefore pillars of the world, were nevertheless punished because they spoke ill of Zion. All who injure Zion shall not be pardoned even as those who harm Israel." This nationalism is not selfish, in spite of the few passages which we come across of bitterness and anger against the foes of the Jews. The Chassidic movement recognised the right to exist of other nations as did all other Jewish national movements. "Every nation and language has a special channel through which it receives God's gifts. But all these channels have the same source, and when one nation receives more gifts than its share, less remains for the others. When the Temple still stood, seventy sacrifices were offered for the seventy nations, so that all channels should be blessed alike, and there should be peace and harmony among the nations, and we must pray that they should be more blessed." "In proportion to the acceptance of the Jews of gifts from a land is that land's channel blessed."

According to the Zohar, all these countries are like heavens, one above the other, and a sky separates one from the other. Hebrew mysticism does not only see earthly divisions between the nations, but heavenly frontiers, stronger, nobler and more lasting than earthly ones. Each nation has a soul of its own, participates in the concert of the world, and therefore has the right to exist. All its desires to see Israel once again in his country, are not only for the material comfort which will accrue, but in order that the Jew shall raise the "Divinity from the dust and redeem it from Exile."

XVIII.—Conclusion.

Official Chassidism has now reached the nadir of its existence. Its literature has ceased, and its leaders are almost totally occupied with the working of so-called miracles, the distribution of charms and talismans, and the cult of wonderful saints of spurious sanctity. It broke away from Talmudical Casuistry, and the bondage of the dead letter, but it has only changed one abstraction for another and has forgotten its realistic basis in the troubles of the Ghetto. The nation, although it found consolation in it for some time, could not permanently maintain its intellectual existence on these symbolic and mystic forms. Life and conventionality were against it. The Haskalah (Humanistic) Movement was an open protest against the degradation of the life in exile, and contributed much to its downfall. If the Chassidic Movement has been living a little longer than the Haskalah it has not outdistanced it by much. It has, however, like the Humanist Movement, contributed to the development of Modern Hebrew literature, though indirectly. The light in the soul of the Chassidic Movement has become its burning light, and whatever may be said to the contrary, the Chassidic Movement fulfilled its mission. Though, of course, many of its sayings and tenets can be found in other places of Hebrew literature, yet they are there but the opinions of individuals.

Its system of metaphysics is not so great since it is full of vague theories, often contradictory, and may fall to the ground in the light of modern criticism. The Jew was then to be found in the gloomy ghettoes of countries which had not seen the light themselves, and where ignorance and superstition still dominate. Spider-like the Jew had to weave his theories from himself. Besides, metaphysics was not the principal object of Chassidism. This it received with slight variations from the previous mystic movements. It speaks rather of the virtues of man, and the inner light which burns in his soul. In every virtue emanating from the pure soul, it sees the divine light that shines from above. Its aim, like that of the prophets, is to render man capable of living a godly life on earth, and to

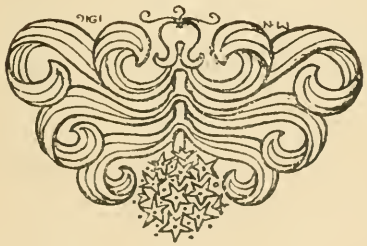
maintain his purity of soul under all circumstances. In spite of the many superstitions attributed to it, it has given out a multitude of brilliant rays, which come as if from the fire of thought which exists in holy things and holds implicit many hints for a philosophy of life. Right through the terrible oppression of the Jewish Nation, the Chassidic Movement always spoke of the redemption of Israel and the redemption of all humanity to follow. "It is a common thought of humanity," said Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, "that when the Messiah comes there will be no death. It is not really so, for even the Messiah will die, but the world will be renovated at his coming and everyone will be ashamed at the folly of his deeds, and from the arrival of the Messiah onwards there will be absolute perfection in the world."

Some will see in this only the arrogance of a little wandering nation desirous of being the nation to produce the Messiah, and indeed thinking itself capable of it. In truth there is neither arrogance nor egotism in this. This desire to raise mankind to perfection was born almost with the first Hebrew, and has been expressed in its literature since the time of the Prophets. It does not come from the desire to dominate the world, as the Anglo-German Houston-Chamberlain wants us to believe. It is more than two thousand years since this beautiful and mighty world was handed over to others. Israel as a nation has had no active influence in it. The Divinity is still trampled under foot. Everything is as it was long ago; even the doctrines of war and murder are the same.

It is still urged in excuse, no doubt, that all war is for self-defence. It is on this pretext that millions of Jews have been slaughtered for two thousand years; or perhaps it is because they gave the world a Messiah to whom the world prays and against whose precepts it acts. The Europeans have brought to the surface Hell, which the Ancients placed in the underworld; and it burns day and night, and in its flame, where thousands have been burned before, millions now suffer. The world is too busy with the creation of statues and images and of other beautiful things. The Jews were the only people whose chief desire was to create beautiful men, and this desire expressed itself in their litera-

ture even in the darkest times. If, then, it is not the Jew who is to perfect Humanity, who will? Those who have had the power till now have not done so.

The Jew should therefore receive all aid in his efforts to re-establish himself in his home once again; when there he will with the rest of the nations help to bring a new world to birth. This is possible, and many now believe that the nation which commenced to create beautiful men will complete its work, and will produce the Superman who will bring about the redemption of the world.



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